Jack Anderson:

Senate probing Hughes' gift to Nixon

LAS VEGAS — Senate sleuths are investigating two $50,000 contributions to President Nixon from billionaire Howard Hughes. The money was handed over in cash to the President's friend, Bebe Rebozo, in 1969 and 1970. Although Hughes' aides describe the $100,000 as a "campaign contribution," the President wasn't running for office in 1969 and 1970. The Senate Watergate committee is investigating reports that the money may have been diverted to the President's personal use.

This is vigorously denied by White House spokesman Gerard Warren, who said: "The President never received any such money." Rebozo refused to comment on the charges. Sources close to him, however, stated that neither he nor the President have ever used campaign money for personal purposes.

WE REPORTED on Aug. 6, 1971, that Hughes' aides "siphoned off $100,000 from the Silver Slipper, a Hughes gambling emporium, for Mr. Nixon's campaign. The money was delivered by Richard Danner, a Hughes executive, to Bebe Rebozo, a Nixon confidant."

Watergate investigators have now verified our story from some of the principals. The payments to Mr. Nixon, the probers have been told, began in late 1969 at a time when Hughes was consolidating his hotel-casino empire in Nevada. Hughes' private papers, which have been made available to us, show he was trying to overcome resistance from the Justice Department's antitrust division.

The Washington Merry-go-round

The first $50,000 was slipped to Rebozo in late 1969 not long after the President personally approved Hughes' purchase of the airline, Air West. The money was delivered by Hughes hotelman Dick Danner to Rebozo, the Senate investigators have been told.

The second $50,000 contribution was made in the summer of 1970 when Hughes became the largest casino operator in the world with the purchase of Harrold's Club in Nevada. Again, it was Danner who passed the money to Rebozo. But this time, another Hughes factotum, Robert Maheu, witnessed the transaction. We have learned that Maheu spoke candidly to the committee about the deal.

WITNESSES have told the Watergate investigators that the $100,000 positively was intended for Mr. Nixon, not Rebozo. What the President did with the money, if he received it, remains a mystery.

In 1969 and 1970, he was completing the purchase of his San Clemente estate. Both Rebozo and another Nixon crony, aerosol king Robert Abplanalp, participated in the acquisition.

The financial details were handled by the President's personal attorney, Herbert Kalmbach, who has denied that any campaign contribu-